From Student to Teacher: Training Near-Peer Anatomy Instructors - A Pilot Study

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Abstract

Background: Musculoskeletal anatomy is a core component of the education of health and movement professionals. In recent years, the use of near peer teachers (NPT), whereby senior students serve as instructors for junior students, has become increasingly widespread. This approach benefits both learners and peer teachers by fostering a more accessible and supportive learning environment while enhancing the latter's pedagogical skills.

Objective: To describe and evaluate a structured training program for junior anatomy instructors and examine its contribution to their personal and professional development.

Methods: Six junior instructors participated in a two-stage training program: (1) a pre-academic workshop focusing on teaching skills, including a microteaching exercise using short instructional videos that facilitated peer feedback and self-reflection; and (2) on-the-job training (OJT) during the academic year, based on Kolb's Experiential Learning Model, including concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and active application. Program evaluation included a 13-item structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

Results: High levels of satisfaction were reported, with item scores ranging from 3.67 to 4.67 out of 5. Thematic analysis of the interviews identified four main themes: (1) the influence of prior experience on training, (2) the gradual development of junior instructors, (3) individualized adaptation of teaching to student needs, and (4) the potential transfer of teaching skills to domains beyond anatomy.

Conclusions: A structured training program for NPTs in anatomy enhanced both first-year students' learning experience and the junior instructors' professional development. The findings demonstrated improved reflective practice, learner-centered teaching, and pedagogical communication, alongside a shift from knowledge transmission toward the facilitation of learning. This model may also be applicable to other health professions, particularly physiotherapy, where comparable teaching and communication skills are essential for professional education, clinical supervision, and patient education.

Keywords: Musculoskeletal anatomy; peer teaching; near-peer teaching; junior instructors; microteaching; on-the-job training (OJT); reflective practice

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